

Lex Joon moved to America to do one thing: win an NHRA championship

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Strutmasters' newest driver Lex Joon might not yet be a familiar face on this side of the Atlantic Ocean, but racing fans on the other side sure know who he is.

Before coming to the United States, Joon spent his time scorching tracks all over Europe in the International Automobile Federation, or FIA.

The Dutch driver and entrepreneur had a dominant stretch in the 2000s that included a Championship in 2005, two runner-up finishes and being rated best overall Top Fuel Driver from 2005-2009.

With a list of accomplishments that spans four decades and several racing categories, one might think Joon was ready to kick up his heels and rest on his laurels. But that would be wrong.

Coming to America

After dominating European Top Fuel racing, Joon decided it was time to try to repeat his success in America.

Joon first raced in the NHRA in 2009, as part of what he and his wife and business partner Gerda Joon called “The American Dream Tour.” He was the first Dutch driver to ever run a Top Fuel dragster in the NHRA.

But “The American Dream Tour” would merely wet Joon’s appetite for NHRA success. After competing in a handful of NHRA races for the next few years, Lex and Gerda made a big decision in 2013.

The couple decided it was time to go “whole hog” on their American Dream and applied for Green Cards to become United States residents. After mountains of paperwork and some waiting, Lex and Gerda were issued Green Cards under the “Aliens of Extraordinary Ability” category in May 2013.

New Challenges for the Joon family

However, the journey to become an American champion was just beginning. The couple chose Brownsburg, Indiana as their new home. The timing, however, made things uniquely difficult.

“Our start was difficult,” Lex Joon said, “because we had to deal with the government shutdown. Our Social Security numbers couldn’t be issued, which implied we couldn’t do anything. We were not able to get electricity or gas. Our car could not be registered. No phone, internet or television, no insurance, driver’s license or company that could hire us. “We are very lucky to have a couple of good friends in Brownsburg that helped us out big-time,” he said.

Once things resumed to normal with the government, life started to look a little easier for the Joons.

“After the shutdown was stopped,” Joon said, “we managed to get our life streamlined. We received our Social Security numbers, which made it possible to apply for all the necessary things that belong to living in Brownsburg.”

Paying dues and paying bills

But the journey didn’t stop there. Joon still required funding to get his racing company off the ground. He and Gerda would go on to spend years looking for sponsors. During that time, they still had bills to pay.

Lex took a job doing something he is quite the expert in—being an automobile technician for high-end European and American cars. He described the experience as valuable and insightful.

“I worked for an auto service center in Clermont, Indianapolis who are specialists in foreign and domestic cars,” said Joon. “They were happy with my work as a technician. I’m familiar with all the high-end European cars and American brand cars.”

“It’s some kind of amusing — I was actually a specialist in American cars when I had my shop in Europe,” Joon said. “But we also handled the common European cars, which helps me now.”

Building from the ground up

Even before moving to the United States, Joon had his sights firmly set on the NHRA Mello Yello Drag Racing Series. While finding sponsors was no problem for Lex and Gerda in Europe, he was not so recognizable in American circles. This meant essentially starting from scratch.

“It’s general knowledge that selling your program is one of the most difficult tasks there are,” said Joon. “When teams like [Don] Schumacher [Racing] and [John] Force [Racing] have no visible results adding sponsors and some of their cars are funded out of their own pockets, it’s obvious we have a huge challenge on our hands.”

“But I’m a strong believer we can make a difference. That’s why we are here,” Joon said.

Many of Joon’s friends and family questioned the decision to move to the United States. After tremendous success in Europe, they would essentially be starting from scratch. But for Joon, the thrill of chasing the dream at the top of his sport was what carried him.

“Our passion for the sport is what made us do what we did. We moved 4,000 miles with our dog, Cha Cha, and a 40-foot container filled with personal belongings and our race program,” said Joon.

Strutmasters steps in

That passion is what caught the eye of Strutmasters founder and owner Chip Lofton. Lofton, who has been steadily building one of racing's more interesting portfolios, agreed to sponsor Joon this July.

“With Lex you have a guy who has dominated his sport in Europe since the 1980s and still has the passion of a young, hungry driver,” said Lofton. “That’s not something you find every day.”

The funding from Strutmasters.com will go a long way towards helping Lex Joon Racing become competitive in the NHRA.

“Lex has emphasised that he is motivated to chase The American Dream,” said Lofton. “Strutmasters has always supported that. Our products are Made in the USA. We built this company right here in North Carolina from the ground up. Lex’s values line up with ours really well. We couldn’t be more proud to sponsor his Dream.”

Joon will be driving the Strutmasters.com Top Fuel dragster in three scheduled races this season: the Chevrolet Performance U.S. Nationals in Indianapolis, Lucas Oil NHRA Nationals in Brainerd. He will also pilot the car in select NHRA Countdown to the Champion races.